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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Father, the source of our hopes and dreams, You are the stable influence that gives us peace in a sometimes chaotic world. We praise You for surrounding us with the shield of Your favor and love.

Lord, continue to guide our lawmakers as they trust You to direct their steps. Remind them that You will not withhold good things from the upright. Use them to illuminate the darkness of faulty thinking and to make our Nation and world a better place to live. Sanctify their thoughts as they daily expose themselves to the wisdom and consolation of Your holy Word.

Lord, as we commemorate the 75th anniversary of D-Day, increase our faith in the power of Your loving providence.

We pray in Your strong Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). The majority leader is recognized.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, yesterday the Senate voted to confirm Andrew Saul of New York to serve as

Commissioner of Social Security and voted to advance several more highly qualified nominees.

Today we will vote to confirm three other executive branch nominees to important posts at the Departments of State and Interior and at the CFTC, and we will advance three more judicial nominees to fill seats on the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia and the Court of Federal Claims.

So the Senate continues to clear the backlog left by more than 2 years of systematic delays and obstruction that extended even to nominees with major bipartisan support—impressive, unobjectionable individuals who had spent months and, in some cases, well over a year on the Executive Calendar were finally granted straightforward votes. The modest rules change the Senate adopted this spring is already making a change.

In 48 session days, from January through April, we were able to confirm just 23 nominees. But in the 20 days immediately following the modest reform, we confirmed 45, about twice as many in less than half the time, and, of course, the number of confirmations has continued to climb in the weeks since then. We need to get these folks on the job for the sake of the country. The President—any President—should be able to stand up a government. The American people deserve to be governed by the government they voted for.

Many of the jobs that have been needlessly held open are not typically the highest profile positions, but they are still hugely important. As I said yesterday, until we confirm David Schenker later today, his confirmation to hold the top Middle East job at the State Department will have been held up for more than a year. This is the Middle East position at the State Department. Yet, as the cloture vote indicated, this qualified nominee carries overwhelming support. The nomination

has been held by Democrats for political purposes. It had nothing to do with the nominee or his qualifications for the position. Given the crisis ranging from Libya to Yemen and almost everywhere in between, it is past time to have an Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs confirmed and on the job.

Later today we will also confirm Susan Combs to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Interior. Her non-controversial nomination has been pending in the Senate since July. Listen to this: since July of 2017—2 years, 700 days, just shy of 2 years. But starting tomorrow, she will finally be on the job.

These are the kinds of nominees who once would have moved swiftly through the Senate and certainly by voice vote. I wish we could rediscover that tradition, but one way or another, we will continue to make progress.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, in addition to nominations, there are a number of other important items that Congress ought to be able to tackle in the next several weeks. As I have mentioned several times, we need continued negotiations in the Senate, the House, and the White House toward a bipartisan government funding agreement to set up the appropriations process. We will also need to complete a National Defense Authorization Act to address critical national security challenges, rebuild our military's readiness, and modernize our Armed Forces to address the growing challenges posed by great-power competitors like Russia and China.

The headlines remain filled with the unacceptable, unsustainable security crisis and humanitarian crisis down on our southern border. By now, I am confident that every Member of Congress has heard the breathtaking numbers. We have all heard the chaos analyzed 1,000 different ways.

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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